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9 MAY

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Use of the Reconnaissance Satellite Photography
by the Civilian Sector and non-USIB Agencies

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A considerable body of evidence has accumulated over the past five years to show that photography from Corona, [redacted]

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[redacted] can be useful to the civilian agencies. To those who work with the satellite photography, it has been clear from the beginning that there was a great potential for using the satellite material for geologic mapping, land use planning, urban planning, hydrology surveys, forest inventory and management and many other purposes. Indeed, a number of demonstrations of such uses have been produced by NPIC and by cleared people in the civilian agencies operating under the auspices of the ARGO Committee in the Office of Science and Technology. In spite of this, however, the government as a whole has been spectacularly unsuccessful in promoting substantial use of this intelligence material within the civilian agencies. Although there are a number of reasons for this failure and much of the responsibility can be laid on the doorstep of the civilian agencies themselves, the intelligence community could take steps which could help a great deal to turn the situation around. The purpose of this memorandum is to propose a course of action you might take to do this.

Over the years, four obstacles have hindered the use of satellite photography by the civilian organizations.

- First, the material can only be used in TK cleared facilities and by TK cleared people. The non-USIB agencies have only a few people so cleared, and few places where these people can go to look at and work on the photography. Thus, few of the potential civilian users are aware of the possibilities. Even where the value of aircraft photography is recognized, there is little understanding of the capability of the reconnaissance systems to provide equivalent coverage for special problems at little or no additional cost. It has therefore been difficult for the civilian agencies to mobilize the interest of working level users to seek and define specific requirements for pictures that they have never seen.

Referral
review by
NIMA/DoD

NRO review(s) completed.

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- Second, no formal mechanism exists by which these agencies can pass their requirements to those in the intelligence community who have the authority to task satellite operations.

- Third, the intelligence community has never taken an official interest in promoting the use of reconnaissance photography by the civilian sector. It has been cooperative when specific assistance or satellite coverage was sought, but it has not assumed a responsibility to help the civilian agencies seek new uses.

- Fourth, considerable inertia has existed within the civilian agencies, sometimes as a result of a natural resistance to doing things in new ways, and sometimes because of vested interests in promoting non-defense programs like ERTS. Sometimes, the strict security surrounding the reconnaissance photography exacerbated the situation by providing an excuse for inaction.

In 1967, to promote the use of intelligence photography among the civilian users, I organized the "ARGO Committee" under the auspices of the President's Science Advisor and with the concurrence and assistance of the DCI. The committee members consisted of Agriculture, Commerce, Interior, AID, NASA, and OEP. The DCI granted a limited number of TK clearances for agency representatives on the committee and assigned the Chairman of COMIREX to participate in committee activities. The committee's purpose was to make the member agencies aware of the material that was available from reconnaissance satellites, to stimulate them to identify uses for the photography, to collate the requirements they could identify, and to pass them through the DCI to COMIREX for consideration in the satellite tasking process. About 1970, the chairmanship was assumed by [REDACTED]

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Over the years this committee provided a forum for communication between the civilian agencies and the community, and was instrumental in organizing pilot studies of civilian uses of the photography and in arranging coverage by satellite and by the U-2 for special projects. The committee, however, was unsuccessful in promoting substantial operational use of the photography.

Also during that period, the Department of Interior built a secure facility at Reston for making topographic maps from TK photography. Thus a facility exists in which TK material can be converted into unclassified information, data or maps for any civilian agency that can identify what it wants. Even so, little use is being made of the material except for topographic mapping purposes and the facility at Reston is operating at less than half its capacity.

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Now that the Office of Science and Technology no longer exists, even the limited ARGO mechanism for assisting the civilian agencies is no longer available. Presumably, the responsibility now falls on OMB to exhort the civilian agencies to find more uses for the classified photography. I am not optimistic that this alone will be any more effective in the future than it has been in the past. We will not make much progress until we find a way to do substantial demonstration studies which use the photography to solve problems of current interest and a way to inform the working levels of the civilian agencies about the results of these studies. I think the intelligence community can help these things to happen, but to do so, it must change from a helpful bystander to a participant with the mission of promoting the use of its product.

I therefore recommend that CIA take the necessary action to bring the possible civilian uses into focus and tie them in some formal way to the operational tasking of our satellites. To implement this, I propose the following actions:

1) That you indicate a desire to promote the use of satellite photography by civilian agencies and assign someone the responsibility of supervising the necessary resources to do this.

2) That resources in the CIA be mobilized to help civilian agencies conduct pilot studies of areas of potential utility for civil purposes and that, where necessary, the resources of NPIC and the production offices be used to perform the necessary work.

3) That we take a liberal view to the granting of TK clearances to these civilian agencies as they mobilize their people to study possible uses.

4) That the ARGO Committee be formally incorporated as a sub-committee of COMIREX and the Chairman of COMIREX be charged with the responsibility of promoting active participation of the civilian agency members.

5) That the current proposal to downgrade the "fact of" satellite reconnaissance to SECRET be approved. This action would allow people who have Secret clearances to be told about and shown Corona photography [redacted]

[redacted] and will go a long way toward helping these people identify ways in which this photography can help them in their business.

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From a much longer range standpoint, we should keep in mind the eventual desirability of bringing all the available photography into a security classification which will make its use by these agencies more routine. The downgrading of the Corona [redacted] photos to secret will help. However, even at the secret level the pictures will be difficult to use in organizations like HUD, Agriculture, and the Department of Transportation, [redacted]

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[redacted] We should therefore be alert to this problem as we consider the eventual declassification of the "fact of" satellite photography. There are, of course, important reasons why this should not be done now. On the other hand, the foregoing represents arguments in support of declassification which should be kept in the foreground in future discussions on this point.

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[redacted]
Donald H. Steininger

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